



NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Angel Tree program gives kids a reason to smile on Christmas

Christmas is a time for reflection and thanks.

It's a time when youngsters go to bed on Christmas Eve with smiles on their faces, then scramble out of bed first thing in the morning to find out what Santa left for them under the tree.

That's why the city's Angel Tree program, now in its 6th year, continues to grow.

More than 500 kids from across the city are guaranteed to receive Christmas gifts this year – everything from clothing to toys to a dozen bikes and riding toys donated by the local Walmart - thanks to generous donors from across the city and festive Angel Trees that were set up in the City Hall lobby and elsewhere.

The goal is to make sure every child gets what they need on Christmas morning - and at least a little bit of what they want – said Lynn Butler, a support services coordinator with the city's Healthy Families Partnership.

Without the Angel Tree program, Butler said, some of the kids would have nothing to look forward to on Christmas day.

“Many of these children end up having extraordinary Christmases – Christmases they will always remember,” said Debbie Russell, the city's Youth, Education and Family Services administrator. “I am amazed at the amount of giving. Despite the economy, the giving has actually been increasing every year,” said Russell.

The program starts every year with a list of children who are recommended through the city's Social Services or Healthy Families offices. Letters are sent to past donors asking if they want to be a part of the program again.

Employees from the City of Hampton agree to help some of the most challenging kids – teens in foster care. Their names are put on the ornaments that adorn the City Hall Christmas trees, and they are adopted by city employees.

Other groups throughout the city, including local churches, pick up the rest. Altogether, about 25 outside agencies “adopted” kids this year to make sure they have a brighter Christmas.

Included among the presents this year are 10 new boys and girls bicycles and two riding toys for younger children that were donated by the local Walmart, 1900 Cunningham Drive.

Edwin Ward, who volunteered last year to wrap Angel Tree presents, noticed at the time that there were not enough bikes for all the kids who wanted one. “I told my mom about it, and how it was really not cool these kids weren’t getting bikes,” Ward said.

When the manager of the local Walmart learned about the problem, he quickly agreed to help. The store donated the bikes and riding toys. “It’s for a great cause,” said manager Scott Huddleston.

The bikes and the last of the other gifts should all be picked up for delivery by the end of the week, ready to be opened on Christmas morning.

Asked why so much is invested in the program, Butler said: “All kids should have something.”

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